IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend claims as shown below, in which deleted terms are shown with strikethrough or double brackets and added terms are shown with underscoring. Please cancel claims 8, 9, 34, and 36 without prejudice and without dedication or abandonment of the subject matter thereof. Please add new claims 37-40, as shown below. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1. (Currently amended) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body, comprising the steps of:

bending a plate material to have a substantially hollow cylindrical shape with end faces of the plate material opposing each other along a joining direction;

bringing the end faces of the plate material into abutment against each other along the joining direction;

the plate material having fingers projecting from corners along the joining direction, and pairs of said fingers form first and second protrusions projecting along the joining direction at opposite ends of the hollow cylindrical shape;

gripping said protrusions by a gripping mechanism such that the fingers of said protrusions are maintained in abutment along said joining direction, the gripping mechanism includes a recess which surrounds outer edges of the pair of fingers of the first or second protrusion such that the fingers cannot move apart in a direction perpendicular to the joining direction;

while the protrusions are gripped in place, friction-stir-welding abutting regions of the end faces of the plate material to join the end faces to each other, thereby forming a hollow cylindrical body having said protrusions; and

removing said first and second protrusions;

wherein said end faces of the plate material are friction-stir-welded such that said abutting region is devoid of a formation of swellings.

2. (Previously presented) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body according to claim 1, wherein said hollow cylindrical body having said protrusions is pressed from a side of an outer circumferential wall surface thereof when the abutting regions are friction-stir-welded.

3. (Previously presented) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body according to claim 1, wherein the abutting regions are friction-stir-welded while said hollow cylindrical body is inclined with respect to a horizontal direction.

4. (Previously presented) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body according to claim 1, wherein a wheel rim that is joined to a wheel disk to produce a vehicular wheel is manufactured as said hollow cylindrical body.

5. (Currently amended) A friction stir welding process for joining first and second metal workpiece ends ~~of a metal workpiece~~ together, comprising:

bringing a first end face and a second end face respectively on the first and second metal workpiece ends ~~of the metal workpiece~~ into abutment against each other; and

thereafter joining said first end face and said second end face to each other along a boundary line where the end faces abut with a rotating friction stir welding tool having a probe with a substantially circular cross section on a tip end thereof,

wherein said first end is present on a retreating side relative to a rotating direction of said probe and said second end is present on an advancing side relative to the rotating direction of said

probe, and said probe is plunged with a central region thereof being displaced from said boundary line to said second end by a predetermined distance within a range equal to or smaller than the radius of the probe;

wherein a rotational axis of said probe extends substantially parallel to a plane between said first and second end faces where said faces are brought into abutment with each other; and

wherein a minimum value of displacement of said probe in said range is greater than 0.

6. (Previously presented) A friction stir welding process according to claim 5, wherein said probe is displaced from said boundary line to said second end by a distance equal to or smaller than one-half of the radius of the probe.

7. (Currently amended) A friction stir welding process according to claim 5, wherein a workpiece having said workpiece end with said first end face and another workpiece having said workpiece end with said second end face are separate from each other and are made of a chief component comprising the same metal.

8-9. (Canceled)

32. (Previously presented) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body according to claim 1, wherein:

the step of said friction-stir-welding involves use of a friction stir welding tool having a probe on a tip end thereof; said probe is plunged into portions of the plate material around said end faces thereof and moved in the joining direction along the abutment between the end faces; said probe having a substantially circular cross section; and

said probe is displaced from a boundary line between said end faces in a circumferential direction of said hollow cylindrical body by a predetermined distance.

33. (Previously presented) A friction stir welding process according to claim 5, wherein each of said first and second end faces of the metal workpiece comprise a finger, which forms protrusions along a joining direction of said first and second end faces when said first and second end faces are brought into said abutment.

34. (Canceled)

35. (Currently amended) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body according to claim 1, wherein the gripping step ~~of said~~ involves gripping only said protrusions ~~includes only gripping said protrusions~~ by said gripping mechanism.

36. (Canceled)

37. (New) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body according to claim 1, wherein the plate material has upper and lower surfaces and the end faces which extend between the upper and lower surfaces in a thickness direction of the plate material.

38. (New) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body according to claim 1, wherein the gripping mechanism includes another recess which surrounds outer edges of the pair of fingers of the first or second protrusion such that the fingers cannot move apart in a direction perpendicular to the end faces, said recesses being spaced from each other and respectively grip

the pairs of fingers of the first and second protrusions during said gripping step.

39. (New) A friction stir welding process according to claim 5, wherein said first end face and said second end face are on opposite ends of a single workpiece.

40. (New) A friction stir welding process according to claim 5, wherein each of the first and second metal workpiece ends includes upper and lower surfaces, and the first and second end faces extend between the upper and lower surfaces in a thickness direction of the workpiece ends, respectively.